

# IN THE LOOP



A quarterly Region I publication designed to keep DAEs informed and prepared



December 2006 • Issue 1

## Director's Message

For those of you who don't know much about me, I was the State Director for the Maine Emergency Management Agency prior to taking the FEMA Region I Director position. In the short six months I have been on the job, I have gained a tremendous appreciation for Disaster Assistance Employees (DAE).

It is FEMA's mission and new vision to become the nation's preeminent emergency management agency. Here in the region I have already begun initiatives that meet that new vision. I have increased our situational awareness throughout New England and I will soon be able to share a new web site with you that will benefit local and state emergency management agencies and every citizen in the region. We have visited every state EMA and personally discussed how we all can be better prepared and work together in a more cohesive way. And I challenge my staff everyday to be on the look-out for training opportunities that will make all of us in the region, DAEs included, better trained and more prepared.

I know you will join me in working to meet FEMA's overall vision and to help make the mission succeed.

Thank you for your dedication and hard work – FEMA could not accomplish its mission without you.



*Arthur W. Cleaves*  
Arthur W. Cleaves  
Director, FEMA Region I

## Stafford Act Changes Made

**W**ith the passage of the "Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006" have come several important changes in the Stafford Act and how FEMA will deliver disaster assistance. In addition, many of the components of the former DHS Preparedness Directorate have been returned to FEMA and several new controls have been put into place to combat fraud and waste. Highlights of the bill are as follows:

**Creating a "new" FEMA** – The act merges much of the current Preparedness Directorate with FEMA, effectively returning FEMA's former Preparedness Division and its functions to the Agency. FEMA will now be a standalone agency within DHS, similar to the Coast Guard and Secret Service, and be headed by an Administrator rather than a Director or Undersecretary.

**New area office** – In addition to the Pacific and Caribbean Offices, a Region X area office will be established in Alaska to serve that state.

**Individual Assistance pilot program** – FEMA is to initiate a pilot program aimed at making greater use of existing rental resources, and can now enter into lease agreements and improve properties if necessary. FEMA must issue a report on the program's progress by March 2009.

**Home replacements and repair subcaps have been lifted** – the subcaps of \$5,600 for home repair and \$11,300 for home replacement have been lifted, bringing the overall housing grant cap to \$28,200.

**Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding increase** – HMGP funding has been set at 15% of total grants under the Stafford Act for amounts spent up to \$2 billion, 10% for amounts spent between \$2 billion and \$10 billion, and 7.5% for amounts spent between \$10 billion and \$35.33 billion.

**Public Assistance pilot program** – Requires FEMA to develop a pilot program designed to lower federal disaster costs by allowing more flexibility in administration of the program. Several initiatives related to debris removal are included, as well as an option for applicants to receive an in-lieu contribution of 90% of the federal share of the federal estimate to repair or replace a structure.

**Changes will give FEMA more flexibility in funding debris removal** – This will ensure that communities will receive at least 50% of estimated debris removal costs within 60 days of the estimate and within 90 days of the application for assistance.

**Curbs against fraud and waste** – The FEMA Administrator will enter into pre-disaster contracts for goods and services that can be anticipated prior to a disaster event when such contracts are cost effective. There will be limitations on the use of subcontractors for completing contracted work. FEMA will receive funding for oversight of missions undertaken by other federal agencies.

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***"All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence."***

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

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## Paulison: “FEMA Will Regain Public Confidence”

FEMA Director David Paulison told the International Association of Emergency Managers 54th Annual Conference that FEMA will regain the confidence of the American people.

In his keynote address on Nov. 13 in Orlando, Fla., Paulison detailed the agency’s focus on establishing core competencies in areas such as incident management, integrated preparedness, operational planning, disaster logistics,

emergency communications, and customer service to disaster victims. He said FEMA is concentrating its efforts on improving its business processes to develop a results-oriented culture focusing on delivering service.

Paulison said as FEMA is strengthened under this vision, it will instill public confidence, better marshal more effective national responses to disasters, and capitalize on partnerships with local, state, and federal authorities.



Director Paulison addresses members of the National Press Club. FEMA Photo.

## New Agency Guidance on Engaging the Media

Excellent media relationships are built on transparency, responsiveness, and credibility. New policy has been established that will allow field response personnel to talk to the media within the scope of their assigned duties and knowledge.

**Guiding principle:** *Talk about what you do.* An example would be an Urban Search and Rescue team member answering a media question about what the team is doing at that moment and what is their mission.

The media guidance allows the agency to be proactive in working with, educating and responding to the media during disasters. Responding to questions about policy and national decisions is beyond the scope of the new guidance and such questions should be referred to an ESF 15 authorized spokesperson or the newsdesk in the Joint Information Center (JIC). The new guidance doesn’t authorize field responders to solicit interviews or pitch stories, that should be handled through the JIC. In implementing this policy, employees should remember the following:

### Guiding principles:

- **Be straightforward and factual,** and stick to your immediate role and assigned responsibilities.
- **If you don’t know, say so and** refer reporter to the newsdesk in the Joint Information Center (JIC).
- **Information that is classified,** breaches the Privacy Act, or involves proprietary information should not be released.
- **Responses to questions that** involve multi-agency operations should be coordinated through the JIC, regional office, or HQ.
- **Questions about policy and** decision-making should be directed to an ESF 15/external affairs spokesperson or HQ.
- **When you talk to a reporter,** ask for their name and media outlet, and pass it along to the JIC.



Tim Gallagher of FEMA explains Urban Search and Rescue functions at a news briefing. FEMA Photo.

### We want your feedback!

This is the first edition of your quarterly newsletter. We envision this newsletter as a tool to keep you informed about what is going on around the region and within FEMA. We hope for it to be an exchange of information tailored to your needs as a Region I DAE. If you have questions, comments, or story ideas, we encourage you to submit them to Region I External Affairs Specialist Cheryl Kitts at [cheryl.kitts@dhs.gov](mailto:cheryl.kitts@dhs.gov). Enjoy!

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Cheryl Kitts  
**Editor**

Lauren Smith  
**Assistant Editor**

Brian Hvinden  
**Special Contributor**

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Region I External Affairs*

## Travel Tips

### From the Office of the Chief Financial Officer

When deployed to a disaster or the required office, there must be a written, approved travel authorization (TA) on file prior to travel. All travelers **MUST** provide the approved and obligated TA number to National Travel prior to ticket issuance. **This TA number will be provided to you by ADD when they call to deploy you.** If they do not provide this to you—ask!

Any travel made with a TA that has not been obligated in the financial system may not be reimbursed.

Disaster Travel Authorizations are for travel to disaster areas for that disaster's specific official business only. These authorizations are not to be used for travel to any other location or for any other purpose (such as training, conferences, or meetings).

Travelers are reminded that any charges made to their government issued individually billed accounts are their responsibility – even if FEMA does not reimburse them for the trip.

## National Travel

1-800-294-8283

Remember, **DON'T** travel until you have been officially deployed by ADD.

## On the Web

<http://www.fema.gov/media/index.shtm>

The latest news releases, fact sheets on policy and programs, PSAs and FEMA-related stories from recent headlines.

<http://www.fema.gov/media/resources/languages.shtm>

Disaster-related material, posted for the general public and grouped by language.

<http://www.ready.gov>

Disaster Preparedness: all the information you need to know.

[www.tsa.gov/311/](http://www.tsa.gov/311/)

Going on a trip? Here you will find the guidelines for packing your carry-on luggage.

## DAEs & Unemployment Insurance Benefits

Your deployment has ended and now you are home again and unemployed. Did you know DAEs can apply for unemployment compensation? When federal workers are unemployed they may be entitled to benefits similar to those of workers in the private sector.

You can apply for unemployment compensation if you have been (1) separated from your job (2) you were placed in a non-pay status or (3) your records have been transferred to a different payroll office. DAEs qualify under the “non-pay” status employees.

If you become unemployed or are in a non-pay status and want to file a claim, go to the nearest local public employment service office of the state employment security agency to register for work and file your claim. Your eligibility for unemployment insurance cannot be determined until after you file a claim. Do not delay in filing a claim. If you wait, your unemployment benefits may be reduced or you may not qualify for any benefits.

When you apply, be sure to have your social security card and number. You will also need your non-pay



status which you can find on the Notice of Personnel Action SF-50. You should have received it when you were hired, transferred to a region or received a raise. Additionally, be sure to have your latest earnings/leave statement or similar documents that indicate you were employed by a federal agency. Contact your region's human resources office or cadre manager for a copy of the SF-50 if you can't find yours.

Payment of unemployment benefits is authorized by and made from your state of residence. The amount of those regular weekly benefits and the period for which benefits will be paid is determined by the law of the state in which you reside.

Your duty station will be printed on the SF-50. All rules about eligibility, appeal and penalties are subject to your state unemployment office regulations.

Source: Department of Labor

## Mandatory Training for FY 2007

Training Course	Required	Offered
Computer Security Awareness	Annually	Online
Foundations of Customer Service	One time only	EMI, JFO
Sexual Harassment	Annually	JFO
Equal Rights Orientation	Annually	JFO
Valuing Diversity	Annually	JFO
Ethics	Once (within 90 days)	EMI, JFO
Employee Awareness	One time only	EMI, JFO
<b>NIMS* Training</b>		
IS-100 Intro to ICS*	One time only	Online
IS-200 Basic ICS	One time only	Online
IS-300 Intermediate ICS	One time only	Online
IS-700 Intro to NIMS	One time only	Online
IS-800 Intro to NRP	One time only	Online

\* **NIMS** (National Incident Management System),

**ICS** (Incident Command System), **NRP** (National Response Plan)

## FEMA Faces

*A quarterly feature on a Region I DAE*

Connie Andrews, a grandmother of five, is a little spitfire who lives by the Golden Rule – treating others as she would like to be treated. She is a FEMA Disaster Assistance Employee (DAE) who travels frequently, exercises regularly, belongs to a reading group and still finds time for an active family life.

A typical day for Connie when she is not deployed at a FEMA field office may include lunch with a friend and a trip to a Boston museum.

The Cambridge, Mass. native raised her family in nearby Waltham, where she resides today. Shortly after her husband passed away in 1987, Connie decided to get a college degree. “When life throws you a blow, you put one foot in front of the other and move forward,” she says.

1994 was a big year for Connie. She retired from the Waltham School District, where she had worked for 25 years. That same year she graduated from Regis College, an all women’s college, with a degree in business administration and communications. After graduation, she joined FEMA as a DAE.



Andrews serves as the special assistant to the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO), and her work has taken her to over 13 states and territories, including places like Guam and Chuuk.

Years ago, Connie was inspired by a story she saw on 60 Minutes about a Harlem principal who encouraged her students to go to Europe because of the life-changing effect it would have on each of them. It was then that Connie decided to take each of her five grandchildren to Europe as they turned 16. She took the youngest to Paris last year. With the others, she traveled to Florence, Rome, Greece, Spain and southern Italy. She also took her entire family to Ireland for a vacation.

When talking about her FEMA tenure, Connie says, “I believe we’re doing something good. FEMA has been a very positive experience for me. I have enjoyed helping people in their time of need. I have also had the opportunity to see parts of this country that I never would have seen otherwise.” Some of Connie’s closest friends are those she has met through FEMA. “When you work, you should enjoy it. You just have to keep a positive attitude and, most important smile.”

\*Connie is pictured here (middle) with her daughter, Ellen, and her son, Bill, during a recent birthday party held for her.

## Travel Credit Card Update

*As of June 10, 2006*

Due to high delinquencies in the payment of credit card balances and due to excessive cash withdrawals, two significant changes have been instituted.

1. Weekly cash withdrawals are now limited to \$105 per seven-day period (including ATM fees).
2. Travelers who are delinquent and/or have exceeded their \$10,000 credit card limit and have a number of cash withdrawals will see their cards being rejected and headquarters cannot, as in the past, help. In these cases, the traveler must either immediately pay to Citibank at least the delinquent balance (possibly more, and possibly with an added service charge), or pay the individual merchants directly. This last solution will present difficulties in preparing vouchers.

The solutions to the above and a possible restoration of higher cash value are:

- Pay your credit card when due (usually 5th or 6th of the month following the statement closing date)
- Voucher every two weeks
- Verify that the Disaster Finance Branch has credited the FEMA split-pay portion of your voucher total to your credit card account